

Planner's Digest

Million Acre Initiative Gets Underway


Marc deBree

In January of 2000, Governor Jim Hunt unveiled the Million Acre Initiative, a challenge to permanently protect an additional million acres of open space in North Carolina. This initiative came in response to a series of community meetings across the state in 1999 in which Governor Hunt's Interagency Task Force on Smart Growth solicited public input regarding the future growth of North Carolina. A clear message that resonated throughout many of these public forums was the need to protect integral open spaces threatened by sprawling growth in North Carolina.

The Million Acre Initiative hopes to achieve its goal of protecting open space in North Carolina by providing coordination and technical assistance to both public and private agencies and organizations in support of their land acquisition efforts. Although the Million Acre Initiative itself will not acquire land, the initiative will work with public and private partners to develop effective land acquisition programs. Such programs will be driven by locally generated priorities for land protection and will fashion locally appropriate conservation measures, such as fee simple purchase and easements, to ensure the protection of designated lands in perpetuity.

To determine if the Million Acre Initiative can help your community protect its essential open spaces, you should ask yourself the following questions:

- Does your community have all the parks, trails and greenways it needs?
- Are your drinking water supplies permanently protected?
- Are important historic and cultural areas permanently protected?
- Does your agricultural community have adequate access to the protection provided by conservation easements?
- Has the potential damage from floods in your community been minimized by sufficiently protecting floodplain areas?
- If wildlife habitats or areas that sustain rare species are important parts of your community, have they been permanently protected?
- If game lands are important to your community, have they been permanently protected?

If your answer to any of these questions is no, then your community may benefit from the support of the Million Acre Initiative. Please look to the Million Acre Initiative website at www.ncparks.net/millionacre for more information. 

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Smart Growth in North Carolina

Elizabeth Federico

The North Carolina Smart Growth Commission completed its year-long mission in January with a list of recommendations for the future of land use policy in the state. The group agreed that the state legislature should grant local governments a set of new tools with which to manage growth. These tools will enable local governments to have more authority to regulate development and levy taxes and fees. The Commission also advised the legislature to develop a smart growth vision and to create a permanent commission with clear guidelines to ensure that state agencies implement the vision.

The Commission concluded that in order to achieve regional coordination of local land use plans, municipal and county governments require sufficient authority to regulate development and raise money for infrastructure and other improvements. It suggested that all local governments be given the power to assess taxes like those granted to Charlotte in 1997. The state legislature allowed Mecklenburg County residents to vote on a half-cent sales tax measure to help fund local transportation projects. Currently, only a handful of local governments have similar powers.

Other recommendations include requiring set-asides for moderately-priced housing in new housing projects, building more schools in urban areas, locating state offices in already developed areas, and implementing new measures to protect farmland, wetlands and beaches.

Additional Smart Growth Resources & Information

In anticipation of the Smart Growth Commission's final report, other academic journals have devoted pages to a discussion of the legal and institutional aspects of growth management. The Fall 2000 edition of *Popular Government*, published by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Institute of Government, is a special issue focusing on

Despite the progress made by the Commission, there remain many points of contention on which Commission members could not reach consensus. Not the least of these is a functional definition of what "smart growth" actually is and what guidelines should be utilized for proper implementation of the Commission's recommendations. As a result, many of the Commission's recommendations remain in a conceptual stage of planning.

The General Assembly is expected to resolve a number these issues over the coming years, including how to ensure proper representation on the permanent commission and assigning who will be responsible for coordinating local plans at the regional level. However, with the current budgetary crisis, the legislature will be challenged to balance increased government costs and oversight with a reduced operating budget. Proposals to spend more money on farmland preservation, for example, are not likely to be implemented right away. The co-chairmen of the Commission, Representative Joe Hackney and Senator Howard Lee, plan to meet to prioritize its proposals and advise ranking members of the legislature.^{OP}

Source: The Raleigh News and Observer

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"Growing Smart in North Carolina." Likewise, the *Wake Forest Law Review* dedicated its Fall 2000 issue to an evaluation of smart growth initiatives both in North Carolina and throughout the southeast. For links to other publications dealing with sustainable development in the region, visit the North Carolina Smart Growth Alliance website at www.ncsmartgrowth.org.